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OPTIONAL FORM NO. 10
5010-104

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

Memorandum

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TO : ARA - Mr. Braddock

DATE: July 26, 1961

FROM : CMA - Mr. Vallon

SUBJECT: Mexican Request for Purchase of Naval Vessels.

Problem Should the Department approve the sale to Mexico of twenty (20) minesweepers for use as patrol vessels.

Discussion The Department of the Navy has for disposal forty (40) World War II 150' steel hull minesweepers for about \$15,000 each. The Mexican Government is seeking to purchase 20 of these ships for patrol duty. As a party to the Rio Treaty, Mexico is eligible to purchase these ships. The United States and Mexico also maintain a Joint Defense Commission established during World War II which continues to exist but otherwise does not perform too useful a function. No other defense arrangements exist with Mexico.

Mexico has some 30 patrol craft, but Mexico is not now capable of performing surveillance activities along her coasts to prevent clandestine activities, e.g., by Cuba. It is unlikely that Mexico would enter into any bilateral agreement with the United States for patrol activity off the Mexican coast. If Mexico had the capability, however, it might undertake more effective surveillance in its own interest and could take care of its own harbor defense. (See attached New York Times article of January 22, 1961). Mexico could also use these vessels to prevent smuggling and other activities in violation of its revenue laws.

U/FW feels strongly that Mexico will use the vessels to enforce Mexico's claim to a nine-mile territorial sea. In the dispute between the United States and Mexico over the width of the territorial sea, Mexico has seized and fined a number of United States flag fishing boats. (See U/FW memorandum attached). Our Embassy points out, however, that the number of US fishing vessels arrested by Mexico is small in comparison with the total number fishing within the nine mile limit claimed by Mexico and that Mexico has the capability/considerably greater harassment if it wanted to exercise it. The Embassy suggests that Mexico would react to a turn down of its request by stepping up seizures of fishing vessels.

Mexico would strongly resent a negative response to its request to purchase these vessels and it would undoubtedly worsen our relations at a time when we are seeking by every means to improve them and wean Mexico away from its present policy which has the effect of supporting

Cuba. The

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ARA : CMA : R M Sayre : mml:gh

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Cuba. The Embassy points out that a refusal would not help our friends in Mexico, e.g., the Mexican Navy, who favor the adoption by Mexico of policies which would support our objectives, but would be used by those who are not disposed to be cooperative or who are even anti-American or pro-communist to support their arguments that the only interest of the United States in a narrow territorial sea is a commercial one. Further, we have recently made naval vessels available to other countries, e.g., Peru, Ecuador and Chile, which have even more extreme claims to territorial sea and have also seized and fined United States flag tuna boats. These three countries, however, have not enforced their claims with the same vigor as Mexico.

Ambassador Mann has been consulted and recommends the sale of the vessels to Mexico. (See telegram attached).

Recommendation That you discuss the foregoing with Mr. Taylor and that you inform him that we feel we must approve the Mexican request for overriding political reasons.

Attachment:

Memorandum of June 20, 1961 from U/FW.

Clipping from New York Times.

ARA:CMR:RMSayre:nml:gd
7/26/61

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